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*The Importance of Religion to Civil
Societies.*

A
S E R M O N

Preached at
St. Mary's in OXFORD,
AT THE
A S S I Z E S:

Before the HONOURABLE
Mr. Justice FORTESCUE-ALAND,

AND

Mr. Justice LEE;

AND

Before the UNIVERSITY;

On Thursday, March 6th. 1734-5.

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of Queen's College.

Publish'd at the Request of Mr. Vice-Chancellor
and the Heads of Houses.

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GUIL. HOLMES

Vice-Can. *Oxon.*

Mar. 18. 1734-5.



GENESIS XX. II.

And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the Fear of GOD is not in this Place; and They will slay me for my Wife's Sake.

“**T**HAT the General Belief and Publick Acknowledgement of the great Principles of Religion, (the Being of a GOD and a Providence) are necessary to secure the Order and Happiness of Civil Societies;” is an Opinion confirm’d by the united Suffrage of the Thinking Part of Mankind in all former Ages. Not only the *Advocates* for Religion, after having establish’d its Truth, generally insist on its Importance to Men’s Social Interests: But its very *Enemies* have been forced to give us such Accounts of its Original and Propagation, as plainly imply a Confession, that the *Belief* of its Truth has always been thought necessary, to deceive Mankind into a Regard to Order, and a Participation of the Benefits of Society.

This Opinion however, while suffered to keep Possession, must needs be a very considerable Obstruction to all Attempts in Favour of *Irreligion*. Accordingly Some of those, who, in this Age of *Doubting*, have discover’d an Inclination less favourable to Religion and every Thing

connected with it, have (consistently enough) endeavoured to remove this Prejudice. Hence, as it shou'd seem, we have been entertain'd with Calculations of the Effects of *Theism*, *Scepticism*, and even *Atheism*, upon *Moral Goodness*: And the same Persons, who have pleaded for subjecting the most *sacred* Truths to the Test of *Raillery* and *Ridicule*, have also propos'd it as a Problem, "Whether an *Atheist* may not possibly be a Man of *Virtue* and *Merit*?" and shewn a Willingness at least to answer it in the *Affirmative*. Nor let *Speculations* of this Kind be thought harmless Amusements only, of refined and contemplative Heads: Our own Experience, I fear, may but too fully convince us, that *Something more than Amusement* has been the Consequence of them. *Unconcernedness* about Religious Principles in general seems to have been for some Time succeeding into the Place of (what used to be accounted) a just *Abhorrence* of Infidelity and Atheism. Our late *Pretenders to Free-Thinking* have indeed, for the most part, chosen *avowedly* to attack *Revealed Religion* only; and even in *such* their *Attempts* the Interests of the *Publick* may perhaps be found by no means slightly concern'd. But 'tis well-known also, that the Arguments they have *generally* employ'd for that Purpose are calculated to carry their deluded Followers *still farther*. And there is great Cause to believe, that those Persons, whom such Cavils are sufficient to *remove from the Faith of the Gospel*, very rarely stop short of a *Disbelief* of, at least an *Indifference* towards, *all Religion* whatsoever.

It

It is therefore become but too seasonable, and will not, I trust, be thought wholly improper on this Publick and Solemn Occasion, to reconsider the Subject above-mentioned: --- to enquire, Whether the general Acknowledgement and Influence of Religious Principles be *really* of so much Importance to secure the *Morals* and *Good Order*, and (which I will here *suppose* to be a Consequence of These) the *Happiness* of Societies, as has been commonly imagined? That, if it should upon Enquiry appear to be so, we may reflect, before it be too late, What Consequences may be justly apprehended, shou'd a Disregard for Religion and Things sacred make any farther Advances amongst us.

The Reasoning of the Patriarch in the Text is on many Accounts very remarkable to the present Purpose. --- *Abraham* appears, from this History of Him (the *Antiquity* of which at least our Adversaries must give us Leave to insist on) to have been one of the most illustrious Personages in ancient Times. By sojourning in several different Countrys, he had Opportunities of making himself acquainted with the Manners and Sentiments of several different Kinds of People; and This too at a Time when the Condition of Mankind approach'd much nearer, than it has since done, to that *State of Nature*, about which some among ourselves have talk'd with so much seeming Familiarity. --- And what was the Result of the Observations of a Person so every Way qualify'd to make them with Advantage? Why; That *the Fear of God* is the only effectual Check upon Men's Lusts and Passions: And that
where

where any Nation or People are supposed destitute of the Influences of this Principle, there is no Immorality, no Villany, no Barbarity, which may not justly be dreaded from them. This was the Conclusion which the Patriarch drew from his Acquaintance with Mankind. From this he reason'd, and upon this he acted, as an unquestionable Truth. --- *And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the Fear of GOD is not in this Place; and They will slay me for my Wife's Sake.*

The *Fear of GOD*, which *Abraham* here supposed the People of *Gerar* to be Strangers to, must be understood to be the same Principle by which himself was actuated, and concerning which he had been in an eminent Manner *taught of GOD*. We have indeed all the Proof that such an Affair will admit of, that the Religion of all Nations, when traced up to its Original, was *Revealed*. But 'tis evident, that the Religion of *Abraham* was directly and immediately *such*. --- It will not then seem foreign to the Import of my Text, if Occasion be taken from thence to represent to You, not only

- I. *First*, The Importance of Religious Principles in general to National Virtue and Happiness; But
- II. *Secondly*, The Excellency of *Reveal'd Religion* in particular to this Purpose; And then
- III. *Thirdly*, Some useful Inferences naturally resulting from the foregoing Considerations.

I. *First*,

I. *First* then ; The Importance of *Religion* to *Morality* may be illustrated Two Ways : By enquiring --- " Whether, on the Supposition of *no Religion*, there *could* be, in *Reason*, any proper *Obligation* to Moral Virtue ? " --- Or, " Whether, on the *same* Supposition, there *wou'd* be, in *Fact*, any effectual *Inducement* to It ? "

It will be little to our present Purpose to consider this Point in the *Former* View. Whatever be determined concerning any supposed *Obliging Power* of Moral Considerations, separately from those of Religion ; 'Tis evident, the Order and Happiness of Societies, as far as the *Natural Tendency* of Things is concerned, is immediately affected, not by what Men's Behaviour *ought* to be, but by what it is in fact *found* to be. The most useful Method of treating this Point therefore seems to be, to enquire, not how Men's *internal Obligations*, but how their *outward Actions*, will be influenced by Religion or by the Want of it. The Enquiry is by this Means brought from the Bar of *abstract Reasoning* to the more obvious, and more convincing Decision of *Fact* and *Experience* : And from considering, What *has been* hitherto observed concerning Human Nature, we shall be able to conclude with most Assurance, What *may* at all Times *hereafter* in the same Circumstances be expected from it.

But here we meet with very different Accounts, even among Those who seem agreed in slighting the Provisions of Religion. If we will believe some great Pretenders to a deep Insight into these Matters, *Man* is a Being by Nature wild,

wild, unfociable, fufpicious, treacherous, malevolent. Others, perhaps out of an Abhorrence of fuch a View of Human Nature, have given us Representations of it very different from the foregoing one, and in fome Refpects from Thofe of each other : Whilft fome of them fpeak of Man as if He were Nothing but *pure Intelligence*, folely conducted by Truth and Rectitude ; and others, as if He were All *good Affection*, fufficiently actuated by kind Inftincts, and a Love of Virtue for Virtue's Sake.

The Truth, I conceive, lyes between the Two Opinions, which I will venture to call, *Extremes*. Human Nature is neither fo bafe and odious a Thing as the One wou'd make us believe ; nor will Experience juftify the flattering Accounts given us of it by the Other. Every good-natured Man *feels* the Injuriousnefs of the Former Representation : And we need go no farther than to the General Occafions of fuch Solemnities as Thefe for a full Confutation of the Latter.

Man, confidered in the Views of *mere Philofophy*, (and in that Manner only the Perfons we are here contending with will permit us to confider him) may be allow'd to be by Nature endued with fuch Faculties as direct, and fuch Difpofitions as incline, him to affociate with Thofe of his own Species ; and to be, as by the Former enabled, fo by the Latter excited, to promote the Happinefs of fuch Affociations when made. But then it muft be remember'd, that thefe Faculties, thefe Difpofitions, as far as they are *Natural* to Man, are *Faculties* and *Difpofitions*

tions only. To reduce them to *Acts*, there must be Willingness and Choice; but to improve them into *Habits*, Care and Cultivation are farther necessary. And, after all, shou'd our discerning Faculties prove liable to be obscured and perverted by Powers of a different Tendency; and our Social Affections to be check'd and restrain'd by others of a Private Nature: 'tis plain, if we sit down contented with surveying only the *bright Side* of Human Nature, and from contemplating what such a Creature *may be*, conclude what he generally *will be*; We shall frame a very *partial* Conception concerning that Nature, and may find ourselves much disappointed in our Expectations from it.

The Suppositions I have been here framing are by no Means merely *imaginary*. Let us leave our Speculations, and follow Man into common Life, and we shall soon find each of them but too sadly verify'd. The first Appearance that will offer itself to our View, will probably be that of the most useful Faculties weaken'd, and the most generous Affections overpower'd, by craving Appetites, impetuous Lusts, and headstrong Passions; and (which is still worse) *perverted*, and render'd subservient to Purposes most prejudicial to Publick Welfare. The Avarice and Ambition of some, the Peevishness and Resentfulness of others, the Lasciviousness and Lusts of still more, meeting with the like Propensities in other Men, wou'd soon, if permitted to operate according to their Natural Tendencies, render this World a Scene of Confusion, Distraction, and Desolation. Man, when under

the Dominion of his Passions, has ever been observed to be one of the most dangerous, most destructive, of Creatures. Even those very Powers, which, when rightly apply'd, give him a just Preeminence over the whole Animal Creation, serve only, under such a perverse Management, to render him more artful in contriving, and more successful in accomplishing, the most mischievous Designs.

What is it then which, *at present*, restrains Mankind from these Ravages, this Destruction of each other? --- This is an Enquiry, about which those Persons are particularly concerned to give us some Satisfaction, who imagine they can sufficiently provide for the Government of the *Moral* World (as some of their Forefathers pretended to have done with Regard to the *Natural*) without taking into their Schemes the Belief of a *GOD*, and a *Providence*. And a Variety of Causes will, no Doubt, be assigned for this Purpose. Great Strefs will be laid on the Powers of *Reason*; greater still on the more active Principles of *Benevolence* and *Publick-Spirit*; others seem to ascribe mighty Things to a Sense of *Honour*: Whilst those who give us the most disadvantageous Accounts of Human Nature, refer us, for a sufficient Security of our Persons and Properties, to the *Power* of the *Civil Magistrate*. --- Let us see then, What might ordinarily be expected from *Any* or *All* of these, shou'd we be prevail'd on to part with (what we have been used to account the Foundation and Support of each of them,) the *Fear of GOD*.

Reason,

Reason, as far as it is a Part of our Nature, is (as has been already intimated) a *Faculty only*; and must, to make it serve to any good Purpose, be carefully cultivated, and regularly employ'd. Give me Leave then for once to *suppose* this Faculty to be thus cultivated, thus employ'd, without either setting out in its Enquiries with a Sense of Religion, or arriving at the Discovery in the Progress of them. And what will be the Result with regard to Societies? Why, we are to expect many curious Disquisitions upon the Nature of a *System*; upon the Relation which the *Parts* of such System bear to the *Whole*; and, in short, upon the Reasonableness, that each Member of a Community shou'd refer his Aims and Pursuits, and even sacrifice his *Private Advantage*, to the *General Good*. But, to speak impartially, Whatever may be said for a Member of Society's sacrificing his own Private Interests to those of the Publick; this must (I suppose) be understood of *such* Private Interests only, as make no Part of his *Ultimate Happiness*. For sure it must ever be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to persuade any Man, at least on the Foot of *Reason*, to give up his own *Final Interests* for any Consideration whatsoever. Whereas, without the Supposition of a *Deity*, every Good we are possess'd of may be our *Ultimate Good*; every Interest we can forego may prove our *Final Interest*. What a Damp then must *Atheism*, or even *Scepticism*, cast upon all *Generous Sentiments*! How heavily must all *Publick Designs* proceed, when the Conductors of them

have not in all their Thoughts that Being, who alone can, in Case of present Interference, Bid Self-Love and Social be finally the same.

But, in Truth, we need not stay to enquire, What our Rational Faculties wou'd direct, on the Supposition before us. If the united Tyes of *Reason* and *Religion*, are so unable to confine Men possess'd with the *Legion* of disorderly *Affections*, as we too often find them to be ; How easily wou'd Men *break the Bonds* of Reason only *in sunder* ! With how little Concern wou'd they *cast away its Cords from them* ! Indeed, Who wou'd *in this Case* think it worth while to collect the Dictates, or to hearken to the Voice, of Reason ? Men that can be contented to *have no Hope, to be without GOD in the World*, must have anticipated the Insensibility they expect for their Final Portion ; or, however, they will, *in Course*, soon abandon the Care of the *Rational*, and deliver themselves up to a merely *Animal Life*. Why shou'd a Man take much fruitless Pains, to *increase his Sorrow by increasing his Knowledge* ; or to cultivate a Faculty, the Improvement of which could at best serve only to render him more ingenious in *disquieting himself in vain* !

The Truth is briefly This. --- The Faculty of Reason, when regularly consulted and faithfully follow'd, will always lead us to the Acknowledgement of a *Deity*, and own itself to be his Gift, *who teacheth us more than the Beasts of the Earth, and maketh us wiser than the Fowls of Heaven*: And when it does this, it comes most

^a Eph. II. 12. ^b 1 Cor. XV. 32. ^c Eccl. I. 18. ^d Psal. XXX-IX. 6. ^e Job XXXV. 11.

strongly recommended to our Care and Cultivation, our Attention and Reverence. But if either out of Laziness Men stop short of, or out of Vicious Prejudice exclude, or out of Self-sufficiency affect an Independence upon, the great Principles of *Religion*: The Dictates of Reason become uncertain and precarious; Reason loses its Dignity, its Authority, and becomes a Faculty in every View wholly unaccountable.

Benevolence and *Publick Spirit* are indeed Principles of a more active Nature, and may perhaps be thought capable of supplying the Deficiencies of *Reason* with Regard to Social Happiness. --- Not to enter into any Dispute concerning the *Origin* of Benevolent Affection: Let us suppose it to be as Natural and as Universal, as is sometimes contended. Yet surely we need not prove, that Men have *other* Affections, equally Natural and Universal, and at least equally importunate for their respective Gratifications. And whenever the Gratification of the former shou'd interfere with that of these Latter (as it frequently wou'd in *Reality*, and more frequently in *Appearance*) we may appeal to Experience to determine for us, what the Result *wou'd* generally be, were Men actuated by no farther Views, no higher Principle. And (which I wou'd observe here once for all) *shou'd* some Few be disposed to hearken to *the still small Voice* of Nature in Favour of the Publick; such a Disposition cou'd serve only to render its Owners a more easy Prey to the Force or Fraud of an infinitely greater Number.

How

How unfriendly a Disbelief of the Principles of Religion must be to Publick Spirit, in the Accounts of *Reason*, has been already intimated: But 'tis more than probable, the Influence it wou'd have *directly* and *immediately* on Men's Pursuits, and their very *Tempers*, wou'd be much more so. The *active* Part of Mankind wou'd naturally put themselves under the Conduct of the selfish and overbearing Passions: Whilst the more *sedentary* wou'd deliver themselves up to Gloom and Melancholy, to Spleen and Sullenness. And how ill must every generous Affection thrive in such a Soil! --- We are surpris'd and shock'd at the Ingratitude and Insolence of ^a *Nabal* to his *Benefactor* applying for Relief under the humble, and at the same Time endearing, Appellation of his *Son David*. But all this is fully accounted for, when we read, that he was ^b *a Man of Belial*; insensible of the Obligations, and a Stranger to the Comforts, of *Religion*; and no wonder then if deaf also to all the Demands of *Humanity*.

With what different Sentiments does a Sense of Religion inspire us towards our Fellow-Creatures! --- That *We have all one Father; who careth for all alike*: That our Interests are in the Hands of a most wise, most gracious, Being? --- What Calmness must such Reflections speak to our Breasts: What Chearfulness must *That* diffuse thro' our whole Conduct towards those around us! Our gloomy Thoughts, our melancholy Apprehensions, are all now dispell'd. Here is Room and Encouragement for every generous Affe-

^a Sam. XXV. 8, 10, 11. ^b v. 17, 25.

tion. Conscious of being continually under such a Protection, we are no longer anxious about our Private Concerns; we can allow those of the Publick a just Share in our Regards. *^a We look not every Man on his own Things, but every Man also on the Things of others.*

Honour, considered as a Principle of Action, consists in a Sense of the Dignity of our Nature, and a Resolution at all Hazards to act up to it. An Habit of Mind, which when conducted by Reason, and supported by Religion, will ever produce excellent Fruits, and can hardly be too much encouraged: But when it takes, (as without Religion it ever will take) popular and prevailing Notions for the Standard of what is agreeable to a Man's Dignity or Character; this same Habit of Mind becomes a most capricious, and may be a most hurtful, Principle: Nor is there, in Fact, any Thing so ridiculous, or so destructive of Publick Order, which our *Men of Honour* will not easily be reconciled to the Commission of, nay challenge Applause for. So precarious will the *Morals*, as well as the *^b Faith*, of those Persons always be found, *who receive Honour one of another, and not the Honour that cometh from GOD only.*

And what is here observed with Regard to *Particular Persons*, is equally observable of *Societies*. We read of some Nations, even in the Heathen World, of whom *many excellent Things* are related as proceeding from a Principle of Honour and Bravery of Mind. But upon Enquiry, it will

^a Phil. II. 4. ^b Joh. V. 44.

appear,

appear, that the Beneficial Effects of this Principle, if not the Prevalence of the Principle itself, always kept pace with the Regard paid to *Religion*. No sooner did any such Nation fall into a ** Dislike to retain GOD in their Knowledge*, but we find them presently *given up to a reprobate Sense, to do* [τὰ μὴ καὶ θεοῦ] *Things least agreeable to, most unworthy of, their Nature.*

The Truth is, *Religion* furnishes us with the *only rational* Foundation for a Sense of *Honour*. If Man be supposed, with Regard to his *whole* Nature, (and something like this the *Atheist*, if he thinks at all, must suppose) *to come up like a Flower, and be cut down again*: like a Vegetable to blossom and flourish for a little While, and then to decay, wither, and sink into the Ground from which he sprung: If he be supposed to come into this World *by Chance*; to *sojourn in it* for a Few Years *as in a strange Land*; continually reminded of his defenceless Condition, and not conscious of any superior Protection; and, after a dull Round of Objects which himself cannot relish, and of Employments which he cannot despise, to drop into *Nothing* as if he had never been! --- Need I ask, What *Dignity* there is in such a Composition as this? No certainly. We must be excused from expecting any great Assistance to Morality, any considerable Services to the Publick, from the *Honour* of those Persons, who own themselves to be of such an Extraction, and can give us no better Account, whence they come, or whither they are going!

* Rom. I. 28.

Civil Government was the last Expedient above-mention'd for securing Mankind against the ill Effects of the Appetites and Passions of each other: And an Expedient it undoubtedly is most beneficial, indeed in Man's present State absolutely necessary, for that Purpose. But 'tis as certain, *Civil Government always has* call'd in the Influences of Religion to its Assistance and Support; and in the Nature of Things *always must* do so.

I insist not here on the Atheist's giving us a satisfactory Account of the *First Formation* of Civil Societies; or on his clearing up the *many* Suppositions *He* must make previously to that of any Constitution of Government at all. Let us suppose with him (without being too scrupulously inquisitive after the Time, Place, Manner, Motives, &c.) that a *great Majority*, as the Governed in every Society must be, have quitted their Favourite *natural Equality*, and subjected themselves to *One*, or (at most) a *Few*, of their Brethren. --- We ask then, "What shall secure, to the *Governed*, the Beneficial Exercise of the Power they have convey'd; and, to the *Governours*, the Firmness and Continuance of the Conveyance?" --- What shall engage the *several Members* of the Community to contribute their respective Shares to the *Publick Weal*?" --- And, in short, "What shall render Government, in every Respect, a *real* and *general* Blessing?"

We have seen, how insufficient the Faculty of Reason, and the Principles of Benevolence or Honour, will always, *of themselves*, be in parti-

cular Persons, to withstand the Force of Appetite and Passion: And, we may well suppose, the *Addition* of *Power* will hardly diminish the Force of those Appetites and Passions, which it gives an Opportunity of Gratifying. Exaltation and Dominion have been always observed to be of an intoxicating Nature. And tho' Government, under the most disadvantageous Circumstances, may seem preferable to Anarchy; yet, 'tis certain, Governours conscious of being armed with Power, and not conscious of any Superior Being, from whom they derive, and to whom they are accountable for it, *might*, and (Human Nature gives us Reason to apprehend) *too generally wou'd*, render a Nation or People sufficiently miserable.

Let us, however, suppose the Governing Part of the Society (from whatever Principle) heartily disposed to promote it's Welfare and Prosperity: Yet, how shall they be secure of being *supported* in their Authority? Or, without such Security, how shall they *proceed* with a proper *Vigour* in accomplishing the Good Ends of it? --- If a Number of Men be supposed to have devolved so much Power, upon One or a Few of their Equals, as is requisite for their Protection, and the Promotion of their Interests: We need not doubt but they will think themselves *at Liberty*, at least to *resume* that Power, whensoever they do not, or (which will be a much more common Case) whensoever they *imagine* they do not, reap the Advantages expected from it. And, whilst every little Disappointment, every trivial Grievance, every wanton Desire of Change, shall

shall, by those who will be at once *Parties* and *Judges* in this Case, be improved into a sufficient Reason for Insurrection and Rebellion : How *precarious* must be the *Tenure* by which *any* Prince can hold his Authority ! How *weak the Hands* of a *Good* Prince in exerting it to any Beneficial Purpose ! How vain must it be to expect, that those Persons, who *“fear not GOD*, shou’d, on any Principle that can be relied upon, *honour the King !*

But supposing the Relative Obligations of Governours and Governed regularly adjusted, and all the Security given of a mutual Concurrence for the Publick Good, that can well be imagined ; Still it remains to be consider’d, “How the *Good Ends* of Government itself shall be *pursued* and *accomplish’d* ? I wou’d on this Occasion particularly specify Two of these Ends ; --- That of *Determining Differences* which shall arise about Property ; --- and That of Protecting (as much as possible) the Members of the Community from mutual Invasions, by *proper* Applications of *Penal Sanctions*. The Dispensers of Justice must in many, if not all, Cases of both Kinds determine upon such Evidence as can be had only from the Testimony of others. Now what Security can they have of the Veracity of such Testimony, but upon a Presumption that the Person who gives it is under the Awe of a Being, *from whom no Secrets are hid* ? Without this Presumption, Courts of Judicature cannot take one Step with any Satisfaction or Assurance : An Oath can give no Security, can have no Sense

in it: and all Judicial Processes must become idle Pomp, and Trifling with Solemnity.

Add to all this, that many Practices, of a Tendency very prejudicial to Publick Welfare, are yet of such a Nature, as exposes them not to the Censure of Human Laws: The greatest Crimes may often be transacted so secretly as to *escape* the *Knowledge*; and the greatest Criminals may sometimes be so numerous, or so powerful, as to *defy* the *Resentment*, of the Magistrate. --- In all these Cases, and many others, Civil Government must ever be unable to punish, and therefore also insufficient to restrain.

In short; without *Religion*, 'tis hard to say what Foundation there could be for any such mutual *Trust* and *Confidence* among Men, as is necessary to the Support of Government, the very Being of Society. Without supposing each other under the Influence of this Principle, every Man might too justly be in perpetual Fear of every other, who shou'd be either stronger or more subtle than himself; so long as the one cou'd think himself possess'd of any Thing, which the other might think it worth while to invade; or so long as the other cou'd be supposed to have either Lust or Appetite, revengeful or even wanton Humour, to be gratify'd by infesting him. The Apprehension that *a every One; who shou'd meet him wou'd slay him*, must in this State of Things be the melancholy Portion of every Son of *Adam*; and all Mankind might joyn in the Complaint, *b "My Punishment is greater than I can bear!"*

a Gen. IV. 14. *b* v. 13.

But,

But ^a *the Lord is King, the Earth may be glad thereof!* --- When we take into our Account the General Acknowledgement of a GOD, a Providence, a Future State; the Face of the Moral World is changed: Society becomes practicable, and Government a Blessing. Where Religious Principles prevail, good *Kings* may reign with Security to themselves, and Benefit to their People. --- Subordinate Magistrates will know themselves to be under the strongest Obligation, the most powerful Engagement, to *decree Justice*: And may proceed in doing so with Chearfulness and Assurance, whilst those who give them Information or Evidence or Verdict, shall do it *in Truth and Righteousness, as seeing Him who is invisible*. --- The Peaceable and Inoffensive Subject will have all the Security with Regard to his Person and Property, that either a Sense of an Almighty Protection in his own Breast, or the supposed Awe of an Almighty Vengeance in the Breasts of other Men, can possibly give him. --- Whilst those who are disposed to be contentious and injurious, must, to come at the Properties of others, break loose from all the Tyes of *Interest* as well as *Conscience*: They must, by giving Disturbance to Society, expose themselves not only to the Wrath of the Magistrate, but to a more inevitable, more dreadful, Indignation: They must give up their own most valuable Interests, before they can allow themselves to invade those of other Men; and become in the strictest Sense *Fools* in order to be *Knaves*.

^a Psal. XCVII. 1.

Upon the Whole; The Remedies we have been considering are such as, in the present State of Things, and *under a general Sense of Religion*, Societies are certainly much indebted to. But, shou'd we once set aside the Supports and Enforcements of Religion, we shou'd soon experience the Insufficiency of all other Preservatives of Publick Order and Happiness; and find Reason to lament our having parted with the only effectual Restraint upon those *Lusts* and *Passions*, *^a from whence come Wars and Fightings, Confusion and every evil Work.* —

A Restraint of universal Extent, and only not irresistible Efficacy: the Influence whereof reaches to every Relation, every Office of Life; which, like the great Object of it, *is about our Bed and about our Path*; which follows us into the closest Recesses, and *meets us in every Thought*: A Restraint, the Powerfulness of which the *Libertine* and the *Atheist* loudly bear Testimony to; the Former, by making it his avowed Quarrel with Religion, and the Latter, his boasted Triumph upon a pretended Conquest over it: But a Restraint, to which *We* must have Leave *to glory in our professed Subjection*; as well knowing, it debars us of no Liberty but such as is destructive of Publick as well as Private Happiness; that it maintains the just Authority of those Parts only (both in the *Political* System without us, and the *Moral* one within us) which are fitted to govern; and requires the Subordination of those only which are fitted to obey: And a Restraint therefore, which we consider

^a Comp. Jam. IV. 1. with Jam. III. 16.

not as the Invader, but as the Guardian, of both Social and Personal Freedom.

After all, I must not dissemble a material Exception to what has been offer'd. --- The *Effects* of a Religious Principle will, in Course, depend much on the *Notions* Men entertain concerning the *Object* of it. Thus, if the *Nature* of the *Deity* be *uncertain*, or his *Will unknown*, a *Morality*, which ought to consist in an Imitation of *That Nature*, and an Obedience to *That Will*, must become *imperfect* and *precarious* in Proportion. But, shou'd the *Deity* be conceiv'd to be a capricious and weak Being, much more, an Example and Patron of Treachery, Debauchery, Cruelty, &c. Such a *corrupt Religion* (a tho' in some Respects better than *no Religion at all*) must have an Influence but little favourable to the Morals of its Professors, or the Interests of Society.

How far the Religion of the *Gentile World* is affected by this Exception, those among ourselves who appear solicitous to reduce *Us* to it, might do well to consider. In the mean Time (Blessed be God!) We *Christians* are prepared to give a full Answer to it. And for this Purpose I proceed to represent to you,

II. Secondly, The Excellency of *Reveal'd Religion* in particular, for Securing and Promoting National Virtue and Happiness.

A Religion, which represents the *Deity* at once in the most *Amiable*, and the most *Awful*, Light : --- in His own Nature, as a *pure Spirit*, *c* every

^a See Hooker's Eccl. Polity B. 5. §. 1. ^b Joh. IV.24. ^c Psal. CXXXIX, 1 — 12.

where

where present, having ^a *all Things naked and open to His View*; ^b *Glorious in Holiness*, infinitely removed from all Imperfection, all Possibility of being so much as ^c *tempted to Sin*: --- towards His Creatures, as a Being ^d *Gracious and Merciful, slow to Anger, and of great Kindness*; yet as ^e *by no Means willing to clear the Guilty*, but as ^f *a consuming Fire* to obstinate Offenders: --- towards Societies or Nations, as in the *General Course* of His Providence making their Prosperity and Adversity correspond with their Piety or Impiety: --- and towards all Mankind in their *Private Capacity*, as having ^g *appointed a Day, in which He will judge the World in Righteousness*; a Day, in which He will compleatly adjust all the seeming Irregularities in His present Distributions; and ^h *render to every Man his Final Allotment of Everlasting Happiness, or Eternal Misery, according to his Deeds*. --- The Truth is, Every Reason already given for the *Importance* of Religion in general to Societies, has been an Anticipation of the Proof of the *Excellency* of *That Religion*, which *alone*, with any *Certainty*, represents it's adorable Object as uniformly and unchangeably *Holy, and Just, and Good*.

And as Revelation has furnish'd us with such Excellent Accounts of the *Divine Nature*, so has it made us, not less usefully, acquainted with *our own*. That the Principles of our Composition are at Variance with each other, has been ⁱ already supposed, and is too manifest from Ex-

^a Heb. IV. 13. ^b Exod. XV. 11. ^c Jam. I. 13. ^d Joel II. 13. ^e Exod. XXXIV. 7. ^f Heb. XII. 29. ^g Acts XVII. 31. ^h Rom. II. 6. ⁱ See pag. 7.

perience: But in the *sacred Writings* alone we read the first Occasion of this ^a *War* between the *Law in our Members* and the *Law of our Minds*; which the *Natural Man* could neither account for, nor deliver himself from. And, as here we learn the true Source, so here we are directed to the proper Cure, of our Degeneracy. Here every Part of our Nature that deserves to be strengthen'd, receives Assistance, Direction and Encouragement; at the same Time that every corrupt and pernicious Tendency is brought under all the Discipline and Restraint, that can be proper to work upon, or indeed consist with, our Rational Nature.

Is *Reason* a Faculty fitted to contribute any Thing towards National Virtue and Happiness? But where do we find the Native Preeminence, the Divine Original, of this Faculty so fully discover'd? Where its Views so enlarged? Where its genuine Dictates recommended by so high an Authority, or enforced by such powerful Sanctions, as in the Revelation vouchsafed us of *His Will*, ^b *who is greater than our Heart, and knoweth all Things*? -- Is *Benevolence* a Principle in any Degree beneficial to Civil Societies? Let the Deist tell us, Where every Affection of the Generous Kind is so described in its Properties, so exalted in its Principle, so extended in its Influence, so incited by Examples, so animated by Rewards, as in that *Holy Commandment*, that Divine Institution, ^c *the End of which is Charity*? --- Is a Sense of *Honour* productive of any Good Effects to the Publick? 'Tis to Revelation we are indebted for

^a Rom. VII. 23, 24. ^b 1 Joh. III. 20. ^c 1 Tim. I. 5.

the most rational Foundation for this Principle, the only satisfactory Account of the Original Dignity of our Nature: And when that Dignity was in great Measure lost, 'tis here, and *here only*, we learn, what extraordinary Methods have been, and still are, taken by every Person in the Ever-Blessed *Trinity*, for advancing *each Part* of our Composition to yet greater Dignity than that from which we fell. --- And lastly, Is *Civil Government* an Expedient necessary to preserve the Order, and Happiness of Mankind? But never was its Origin explain'd; never its Powers guarded from Abuse on one Hand, and from Insult on the other; never its several Good Ends provided for, in so summary, so certain, and so authoritative a Way, as by Revelation: which informs us, without any tedious Deductions, that *a Civil Powers are the Ordinance of GOD*; that *Rulers are the Ministers of GOD* to their People for Good, and that the People *must needs be subject, not only for Wrath but also for Conscience Sake*.

But still more eminently does the Excellency of our Religion, and its Usefulness to Societies, display itself, in removing the very *Cause* of all Social as well as Personal Disorder: not by an idle Attempt to extirpate our Affections, but by first purifying and exalting them, and then placing before them Objects most worthy of their Pursuit. --- Are Societies disturbed, and *the Foundations of the Political World put out of Course*, by Men's intruding into the Province, and impertinently censuring the Conduct, of their Superiors? Christianity calls home Men's misapply'd

Concern, bidding them ^a *Study to be Quiet and to do their own Business*. --- Are Men's Endeavours for the Benefit of Others and the Service of the Publick, check'd and restrain'd by an Attention to *private* Interest? Christianity *alone* has effectually, and against all Casualties, reconciled these interfering Tendencies. It has placed our Kindness to others at once on the most ^b *Generous* and most *Rational* Foundation; teaching us to desire no *present* Returns for our Good Offices, yet assuring us of an abundant ^c *Recompence at the Resurrection of the Just*. --- Are Revengefulness and Litigiousness productive of any Ills to Societies? ^d *This Wisdom which is from above is first Pure, then Peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated*. It banishes that *Love of the World* and that *Pride of Life*, which make our Competitions degenerate into Quarrels; which give Keeness to our Resentments, and Continuance to our Enmity: It forbids not a due Care for our Temporal Interests, nor debars us of any *fair* Methods of recovering them when invaded: But by extending our Prospect into a far better Country, and engaging our Hopes and our *Hearts* upon the *Treasures* of that Place; It scarce leaves Room for a Temptation *to fall out with our Brethren by the Way*; to enter into any great Warmth, or to cherish any lasting Hatred, on the Account of any Thing in this World.

From such an Institution what Assistance and Encouragement must not Morality receive? how friendly must it needs be, in its Natural Tendency, to the Interests of Civil Societies? What

^a 1 Thess. IV. 11. ^b Luk. VI. 35. ^c Luk. XIV. 14. ^d Jam. III. 16.

cou'd a Lover of Mankind more ardently wish for, than that such a Religion should be every where receiv'd, every where obey'd? --- But I hasten to suggest to You,

III. *Thirdly and Lastly*, Some of those *Inferences* which seem naturally to result from the foregoing Considerations. And

First, From what has been said 'tis obvious to infer, that *Civil Magistrates* and All that are intrusted with the Care of Publick Order and National Happiness, are, for that very End, highly concern'd to support and encourage *Religion*.

And here, by *Religion* I understand, not only the *internal* Belief of a GOD and a Providence, together with such Affections of Love, Reverence, Trust, &c. as that Belief tends naturally to produce; but also those *outward* Expressions of Both in Acts of *Social* Worship, by which I will *presume* a Society of *Reasonable* Creatures, sensible of many *common* Wants to be supply'd, many *common* Calamities to be averted, many *common* Benefits to be acknowledged, wou'd conclude it necessary to apply to their *common* Creator and Governour. That *Religion* in the former Sense, however it may be in its *Principle* a *Personal* Matter, will ever in its *Effects* greatly affect *Societies*, has already appear'd. But I wou'd here observe farther, that even *Personal* Religion never did, never will, generally or considerably prevail, where some *Publick Profession* of it is not regularly kept up; where the Members of a Community are not frequently call'd together to *recognize* the Authority of the Supreme
Being

Being, and to confirm their awful Sense of His Power, Majesty, and Goodness, by devout *Expressions* of it. And (I may add) Attendance on some *visible* Worship of Almighty God is necessary to lay a Foundation for mutual *Trust* and *Confidence* among the Members of a Society, by enabling them to give each other *Satisfaction* of their being under the Influence of the same common Principle. -- In short, Both the *Internal Principle* and the *External Profession* of Religion are necessary, not only as Branches of our Duty to God, but to secure the *Natural* Good Ends of Religion to Civil Societies. For the Promotion and Support of Each therefore, every prudent as well as pious Magistracy will think itself concern'd to make a competent Provision.

I must not stop here. It has been already intimated, how much the Morals of a People may and must suffer from a *corrupt* Religion, from unworthy Notions, or impure Worship of the Deity. Every Reason therefore which can be given for the Magistrate's supporting and encouraging *Any* Religion, will plead for his distinguish'd Favour to *such* a Religion, and *such only*, as is in its Representations of the Divine Being, and of the Methods of applying to Him, Pure and Holy; and in its Precepts and General Tendency at once Beneficial to the Social and Personal Interests of Mankind. How fully the *Christian* Religion, comes recommended to Favour under Each of these Characters, (even separately from that far superiour Title to *Reverence* which its *Divine Original* gives it,) I need not now stay to illustrate. Let me only add, That if among the several Denomi-

nominations of Christians there be *One*, which has preserved the due Medium -- in its *Discipline*, between Tyranny and Persecution on one Hand, and Licentiousness and Anarchy on the other; --- in its *Doctrines*, between such Infallibility as precludes all private Judgment, and such Uncertainty as wou'd render a Revelation insignificant for the Purpose of a Rule of Faith; --- in its *Worship*, between superstitious and idolatrous Pomp, and a Neglect of Decency and Order: --- If in its *profess'd Principles* it be best fitted to promote publick Peace and Happiness, and in its *external Polity* best adapted to the Form of the Civil Constitution: --- and if, over and above all these, it be in *every Respect* most conformable to the Original Standard, and to the Usages of the Best and Purest Ages of Christianity: Such a Society of Christians (we trust) will ever recommend itself to a Wise and Religious Prince, as worthy of *His First and always His Chief Care*. And we acknowledge it with humble Gratitude to Almighty GOD, and with all due Thankfulness to those whom he hath set over us, that we of the *Church of England* can with Pleasure make the Application. --- But

Secondly, We may farther infer, that all Attempts to remove the Influences of *Religion*, or to set Men loose from a Sense of its *sacred Obligations*, may be consider'd as so many Attempts against Publick Order and Happiness, and be justly *resented* as such by the Guardians of it.

I wou'd not here be understood as desiring by this Inference to subject all those to the Magistrate's *Resentment*, who may not, by the fore-
going

going one, be recommended to his *especial Favour*. The Subject before us leads me not to consider the Case of a *Quiet Separation* (out of a *real Principle of Conscience*) from the Communion favour'd by Publick Wisdom; nor yet of such an *Opposition* to the Terms of that Communion, as is consistent with *Publick Peace*, and the inviolable Regard due to *Religion* in general, and to so excellent a Religion as the *Christian* in particular. Thus much indeed is certain; a wise Government, jealous of all Advances towards *Irreligion*, will ever have a watchful Eye upon all such Disputes as, either on Account of the Matters debated, or the Manner of debating them, appear to have a Tendency *That Way*. The Case, however, which I have principally in View, is that of Opposition, not to *particular* Forms of Church-Communion or Establishments, under the Acknowledgement of the same Divine Revelation; but to *all* Church-Communion, *all* Establishments, *all* Revealed Religion; and yet more especially, that of Attempting to rob a Nation of all Sense of *any* Religion, or (which amounts of the same Thing) to deprive them of a Religion, the good Effects of which they have long experienced, without leaving them any *determinate* one to supply its Place. This is an Attempt *directly* and *immediately* affecting the Publick Welfare, and incapable of Alleviation from any Plea either of *Conscience* or *Charity*: And is an Attempt therefore, against which every Government is concern'd to express a *perfect Hatred*, and to count the Authors (what indeed they are) *its own worst Enemies*.

The Resentment here pleaded for will (no Doubt) be called, *Persecution*, by those who are forward to deserve, but unwilling to suffer, it. Let it however be called Persecution for *Un-righteousness*, for *Blasphemy*, for avow'd *Atheism*; And for *such* Persecution, (if a Defence of every Thing sacred *must* be *so* called) no Good Man need be ashamed to plead. No Man complains of the Execution of the Laws against Robbers, Perjured Persons, Murderers, &c. And, "Whether *They who break one of these Commandments*, or *They who teach Men so*; who remove from them the only effectual Restraint from the Worst of Villanies, by instructing them to be under no Apprehension of *Guilt*, nor (in Cases of Secrecy) of any *After-Punishment*; are more heinously criminal in themselves, or more *extensively* injurious to the Publick", can surely be no difficult Matter to determine. --- But

Thirdly, I beg Leave to infer, that *those Persons*, who have voluntarily dedicated themselves to the Office of explaining and inculcating the great Principles of Religion, and the Duties of Morality, and have devoted their Time and their Labours to a *continual Attendance* on this Service, may reasonably expect to be consider'd, regarded, and supported, as *useful* Members of the Community.

We may declaim plausibly upon the Self-Sufficiency of that Reason which is common to all Men; it may be said, that the Doctrines and Duties of Natural Religion, and, in a Country where the Scriptures are in every Body's Hands, those of Reveal'd Religion also, must be clearly discoverable

verable by Reason: And this Kind of Flattery will always be most greedily swallowed by those who are least entitled to it. But (to consider this Matter impartially) by *What Reason* are these Things so clearly discoverable? Not surely by the Reason of *Children*, either in Age or in *Understanding*: But by Reason regularly cultivated, faithfully consulted, and as faithfully followed; And of how small a Part of Mankind such Reason as *This* will ordinarily be the Portion, let Experience determine. --- In Fact, Information and Instruction are necessary to give Mankind in general a proper Acquaintance with those Truths, which they are most nearly concern'd to know. And, even after the *good Seed of the Word is sown, and has taken Root; the Cares of this World*, the numerous Concerns, about which the greatest Part of Mankind ever have suffer'd, ever will suffer, their Time and their Thoughts to be almost wholly engaged, wou'd soon *choak it, and render it unfruitful*; were not the same watchful Care employ'd in a continual Cultivation of it. To speak freely; that a considerable Part of our Species does not degenerate into Barbarians and Savages, is in great Measure owing to some such Stated Returns of Attendance on the Publick Worship of Almighty God, and of Hearing His Word explain'd and enforced, as we of this Nation (happy, if we cou'd but be made sensible of our Happiness!) enjoy. By the Labours of a *standing Order of Preachers*, (a Privilege unknown to the Gentile World) *the Bread from Heaven falls, as it were, among our Tents, even round about our Habitation*. And if

we take into the Account, the more familiar Methods of instructing the Young and Ignorant, advising the Diffident, reproving the Froward, encouraging the Well-disposed; speaking Satisfaction to the Scrupulous, Relief to the Desponding, and Peace to the Departing, Soul --- These are Offices, which ('tis hoped) will not fail to conciliate the Friendship of every Lover of Mankind, to an Order of Men so usefully employ'd, if not on Account of their Divine Institution, yet at least *for their Work's Sake*.

There is one Consideration farther, which I take Leave to mention under this Article, and at this Time. --- We have heard much of late of the Spreading of *Popery* in this Kingdom; and 'tis a Report which cannot be receiv'd with Indifference or Unconcernedness by any Lover of his Country or his Holy Religion. But to what can this Appearance be more probably ascribed, than to those Suspicions and Jealousies, which the more unlearned Part of the Laity have been *taught* to entertain for their proper Pastors, the *Parochial Clergy*? He must be a *Stranger* among us, *who knows not*, what extravagant Writings have of late Years been publish'd, and with what Affiduity they have been dispersed; reproaching not only some *Scandals* to the Order, but the *Whole Order in general*; as mercenary and designing, as aiming at Nothing but Dominion and Wealth, and as prosecuting an Interest not only distinct from, but opposite to, that of the rest of Mankind. As to the *Justness* of these General and Undistinguishing Charges, the World must judge between us. What I wou'd

ob-

observe is, that, when by such repeated Inve-
ctives the People have been *work'd up* into a Dis-
like and Hatred of those, to whom not only the
Laws of *Christ*, but the Laws of the Land have
directed them to apply in Cases of Doubt and
Difficulty; What can be expected, but that they
shou'd either throw off all Concern for Religion,
or fall an easy and willing Prey to those Emis-
saries, who will be always at Hand, ready to
offer them a *safe Conduct*, and to recommend
their delusive Attempts with the Appearance of
great *Disinterestedness*, and extraordinary San-
ctity. What Numbers, especially among the *un-
learned and unstable*, have been in this Manner
reconciled to the *Romish* Communion, it is not
perhaps easy to say. But *thus much*, I presume,
we may collect (if *any Thing* can be collected)
from the Experience of past Times --- That if
ever *Popery* is effectually kept out of this King-
dom, this must be done, not by Throwing down
the Fences of our present happy Establishment,
nor by alienating the Affections of the People
from those, who are appointed to guard them
from Delusion; (Methods which must ever give
the *Romanists*, as indeed they ever have given
them, the Advantages they most wish for against
us;) but by a steady Adherence to that *Eccle-
siastical Constitution*, which has always been the
Glory, and has on many Occasions proved itself
to be the *Bulwark*, of the *Reformation*.

In short; If the Interests of *Societies* be at all
concerned in the Prevalence of *Religion* in ge-
neral, or the Happiness of *This Nation* in that
of *Reform'd Religion* in particular; 'tis as certain,

that the Credit and Influence of Both is closely connected with the Reputation of those who are appointed to *Teach* them. A Consideration, which must ever plead for a suitable Regard and Support to those Teachers; as it is undoubtedly a most powerful Engagement upon Persons, in a Situation of so great Consequence, to ** Take Heed unto themselves.* --- But to return :

The Inference before us is manifestly extended, in the Reason of it, to *Places* set apart for *Training up* the Youth, and Growing Hopes of the Nation in the useful, the necessary, Principles of Virtue and Religion. This indeed seems on all Hands so well understood, as to need no Illustration. *The Reproaches of them that reproach* our excellent Religion constantly *fall on* These Societies, so happily form'd for the making early and successful Impressions in Favour of it: And as They are honour'd with the same Enemies, so (Blessed be GOD) They can boast the same Friends. The Protection with which we are favour'd with Regard to our *Ancient Privileges*, and the Encouragement given to our *Publick Works*, are such Honourable Testimonies in our Favour, as we acknowledge in *All Places with All Thankfulness.* --- May These illustrious Seminaries always enjoy the Friendship of the Publick ! as, I trust, They will ever continue to deserve it, by making the Cultivation of Learning and Loyalty, of Honour and Virtue, and (for the Sake of every Thing amiable and praise-worthy) of *the Fear of GOD*, their constant Care.

Lastly, and to conclude: Let us All, as we

would approve ourselves not only faithful *Servants of GOD*, but hearty *Friends* to our *Country*, give all *Diligence*, first to fix in *our own Minds*, and then, as our *Stations* and *Influence* shall enable us, to propagate in the *Minds of others*, a just *Sense of the Truth and Importance of Religion*, both *Natural* and *Reveal'd*.

Hitherto You have heard both these recommended as of Importance to the Order and Happiness of *Civil Societies*: And we hope they, in *this View*, appear entitled to Protection and Patronage from *All that are in Authority*. But I must not conclude without observing, that we can go much farther in our Recommendations of them. We solicit not the Favour of the Great, or the Protection of the Powerful, from any *Distrust* of our Cause. The Advocates for our Faith have produced many *convincing Proofs*, I doubt not to call them, *Demonstrations*, of the Truth and Certainty of both *Natural* and *Reveal'd Religion* --- Such *Demonstrations* as the Nature of the Subjects will admit of, and such as are incomparably superiour to those we scruple not to reason and act upon in any other Part of Conduct. And if our Religion be *True*, (as most unquestionably it is) it concerns us to remember, that the Consequences of our Receiving and Obeying it, how important soever they may be to us in our *Social Capacity*, are, with regard to our *Personal Capacity*, inconceivably more so: They will follow us into that World, where *Civil Societies* shall have no Being; and will determine our Condition in a State Endless and Unchangeable.

May

May we all then, from a rational Conviction of the Truth, and a constant Sense of the Obligations, of our Holy Religion, carefully and conscientiously discharge our respective Duties in our several Stations, *as to the LORD, and not to Men.* --- So shall *the Work* of our Country prosper in our Hands, and we shall derive upon it the *a Blessedness of a People who have the LORD for their GOD.* And, when all these Associations, to which we here stand related, shall be dissolved; when *every One of us* shall give an Account of Himself before the Judgment Seat of CHRIST, stript of all these Marks of Distinction which the Ends of Government now make necessary: Such a diligent Improvement, and religious Application, of our Talents, to the Glory of GOD and the Good of Mankind, shall secure to each of us that Gracious Sentence from our merciful Judge, --- *b Well done, Thou good and faithful Servant: Thou hast been faithful over a few Things, I will make Thee Ruler over many Things: Enter Thou into the Joy of Thy LORD.*

a Psal. CXLIV. 14. *b* Matt. XXV. 21.



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